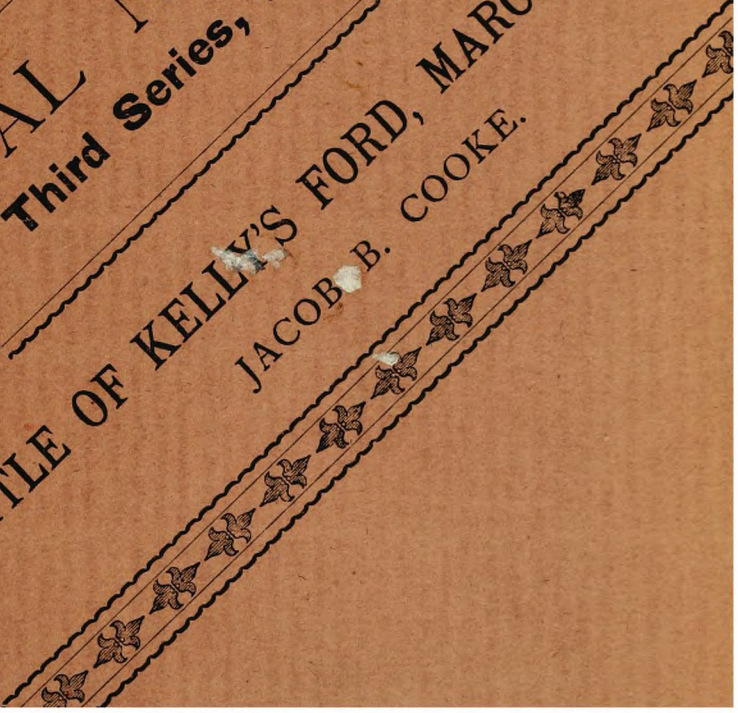

Soldiers' and Sailors' Historical Society
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PERSONAL NARRATIVES:
Third Series, No. 19.

BATTLE OF KELLY'S FORD, MARCH 17, 1863.
JACOB B. COOKE.



PERSONAL NARRATIVES
OF EVENTS IN THE
WAR OF THE REBELLION,

BEING PAPERS READ BEFORE THE
RHODE ISLAND SOLDIERS AND SAILORS
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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PROVIDENCE:
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1887.

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THE BATTLE OF KELLY'S FORD,

MARCH 17, 1863.

BY

JACOB B. COOKE,

[Late First Lieutenant, First Rhode Island Cavalry.]

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[Edition limited to two hundred and fifty copies.]

THE BATTLE OF KELLY'S FORD.

THE two happiest years of my life, the years which I look back upon with the greatest satisfaction, were the two years which I passed as a member of the First Rhode Island Cavalry. It ought to be a matter of pride to every man to have been a member of it, whether as private or officer. I had the pleasure of meeting General Hooker in Cincinnati in 1871, and in the course of conversation he said to me that he considered the First Rhode Island Cavalry to have been one of the best, if not the *best* regiment of cavalry in the Army of the Potomac. And I believe that his opinion was that of every general officer who had occasion to make use of its services.

I arrived in Providence on the ninth day of December, 1861, for the purpose of enlisting in the

regiment. I brought with me to Colonel Lawton, then commanding, a letter of commendation from Colonel Lawrence, of the Fifth Massachusetts Infantry, with which regiment I had served through the first three months' campaign, participating in the first Bull Run battle and its subsequent retreat, the culmination of which was an attack of typhoid fever which kept me in Washington several weeks after my regiment was mustered out. The First Massachusetts Cavalry, with which the First Rhode Island afterwards had such intimate associations, was just completing its enlistment when I had recovered sufficiently to re-enter the service, and thinking my chances for promotion would be better, I came to the First Rhode Island.

Immediately upon my enlistment, Colonel Lawton gave me a warrant as Quartermaster Sergeant, and I reported to Captain Gould for duty. A few days afterwards I was promoted to be one of the regimental Sergeant Majors. At this time the regiment had a battalion organization, with three Sergeant Majors, three Quartermaster Sergeants, and three Commissary Sergeants. When the battalion organ-

ization was done away with, I was made the regimental Sergeant Major.

Owing to his showy uniform, the Sergeant Major of a cavalry regiment is about the most conspicuous individual in it, and if I did not put on any airs it was not because I did not feel all the "pomp and circumstance" of my new position. I think, however, I must have shown a little of the peacock nature, for I can well remember my dignity being hurt on several occasions after I had purchased my first "thigh boots" by some of the men (who had not that respect for my exalted rank (?) which they should have had) calling after me — when their escape behind the stables was well assured — "Say, boots, where are you going with the boy?" What with the riding lessons, the breaking in of horses, the squad and company drills, the sabre exercise, with its everlasting right and left moulinét, the time passed pleasantly enough, although we were all glad when we left Pawtucket for Washington.

What member of the regiment will ever forget the discomforts and hardships of "Camp Mud," at Warrenton Junction, Virginia, which we took pos-

session of on the seventh day of April, 1862? The first three days at that camp, with the pitiless and continuous falling of rain, hail and snow, provided with nothing in the way of camp equipage but our rubber ponchos, which, when several were fastened together, made a partial covering only; the endeavor to floor our huts with fence rails and underbrush in a vain effort to keep our bodies raised above the mud; the horses dying at the picket lines for want of shelter and forage; all formed a picture of misery, and an epoch in the history of the regiment which will always remain vividly impressed upon our memories.

What member of the regiment will ever forget the lustre conferred upon it by the gallant action of the New Hampshire Battalion at Front Royal, which ended with the death of the dashing Ainsworth? an action which will favorably compare with that of any body of troops in any war, and which showed the stuff of which the regiment was made.

On the ninth of August, 1862, at Cedar Mountain, the First Rhode Island achieved a reputation for coolness under fire, and steadiness of manœuvre in

face of the enemy, which was an enviable one, and which it verified afterwards on many a well-fought field.

Whatever may have been the faults of Colonel Duffié, there is no gainsaying the fact that he was probably the best regimental cavalry drill-master and tactician in the army, and also a brave and gallant soldier. An incident will illustrate his coolness under fire. At the battle of Groveton, which the First Rhode Island opened, being relieved after having been for a considerable time under fire, by the Fourteenth New York Infantry, I was sent by the Colonel to notify the First Battalion, which was deployed in front as skirmishers, to withdraw and join the regiment, which, when I rejoined the Colonel, was halted in a roadway, within range of the Confederate artillery. After reporting to the Colonel, I remained by his side at the head of the column. In a moment he turned to me and said, "Cookie, have you some tobacco?" I replied in the affirmative, and handed him some from my saddle-bag. He took a piece of paper from his pocket and commenced rolling a cigarette. The

operation was, possibly, half finished when an unexploded shell struck the ground immediately in front of us. The Colonel regarded it with the utmost coolness, not stopping for an instant in the rolling of his cigarette, while I, I must confess, felt that my absence from that particular spot at that particular moment would be beneficial to my health; but, of course, I had to remain and face the music. In a moment the shell exploded, spattering the dirt in our faces, but doing no damage. The Colonel coolly brushed his clothes and lit his cigarette.

At the battle of Chantilly, I well remember seeing General Phil. Kearney dashing across the field, his horse flecked with foam, the bridle reins in his teeth (his left arm had been left on Mexican soil), his sabre poised high in air, the very incarnation of the spirit of war. A more gallant soldier never set foot in stirrup.

But I must proceed to tell you of the affair at Kelly's Ford. I ought to know something of this battle, for the associated press dispatches giving the particulars of it which were published in the Northern papers on the nineteenth of March, 1863, headed

the list of killed with my name, in mistake for that of Lieutenant Nicolai. A memorial service was held by a Sabbath-school at Charlestown, Mass., of which I had been a member; the Boston and Charlestown papers published glowing obituary notices, and my eldest brother went down to Virginia after my corpse, which he found to be a remarkably lively one.

This battle, for it may be dignified by that title, was of very grave consequence; not so much in the number of men engaged, nor in the number of killed and wounded. Its effects were moral rather than physical. Previous to it, the entire artillery and infantry service had heard of the pertinent question of General Hooker, "Who ever saw a dead cavalryman?" and often as we passed them on the road sarcastically greeted us with it, much to our discomfiture. The result at Kelly's Ford changed all this. For the first time our cavalry had a chance to pit itself against that of the enemy. It was a given and accepted challenge of man against man, horse against horse, and sabre against sabre.

The result was such as to elevate us in the eyes

of the army, to increase our confidence in ourselves, and to increase our *esprit de corps*.

On the fourteenth of March, 1863, General W. W. Averill, commanding the Second Division of cavalry of the Army of the Potomac, asked and received permission from General Hooker to take his division across the Rappahannock and attack Fitzhugh Lee. On the fifteenth, Colonel Duffié reviewed his brigade, the First, and at the conclusion of his review informed its officers that it was to move the next day.

On the morning of the sixteenth, the division, numbering about three thousand men and horses, with four days' rations and one day's forage, left its camp at Potomac Creek Station for the purpose of attacking the forces under Lee, reported to be in the vicinity of Culpeper Court House. There were in the command two hundred picked men from the First Rhode Island, under command of Major Farrington. The division arrived at Morrisville at about six o'clock that evening, where it was joined at midnight by the Sixth New York Independent Horse Battery. On the night of the sixteenth, the camp fires of the

enemy were seen by our scouts between Ellis's and Kelly's Fords, and the drums, beating the retreat and tattoo, were heard from their camps near Rappahannock Station. Rebel cavalry were seen by our pickets on the roads leading west, during the evening.

Lieutenant-Colonel Curtis, of the First Massachusetts, received orders during the evening to remain in Morrisville and take charge of all the pickets left north of the Rappahannock. He directed Colonel Doster, of the Fourth Pennsylvania, with two hundred and ninety men, to start from Mount Holly Church at four o'clock the next morning, and drive the enemy's pickets towards Rappahannock Station; to go thence to Bealton, and finally to station himself at Morgansburg and communicate with a picket which would be established at Elk Run, and with his (Curtis's) force at Morrisville. These orders were executed and the enemy was driven out of that section. Colonel Curtis's force numbered about nine hundred. Small parties of our cavalry had been sent two to four hours in

advance of the main body of the command to mask its approach. Captain Hart, of the Fourth New York, with one hundred picked men from that regiment, and the Fifth United States Regulars, was ordered during the evening of the sixteenth to proceed to Kelly's Ford, and at the first glimpse of dawn to dash across and capture the pickets on the south bank. He was to be supported by the rest of the regiment. These orders were given personally to Captain Hart by Major Chamberlain, chief of General Averill's staff, and a guide was furnished him.

At four o'clock on the morning of the seventeenth, the command was awakened without the blowing of the reveillé, and after a hasty breakfast took up its line of march for Kelly's Ford, about four miles distant. There were about twenty-one hundred men in column, composed of seven hundred and seventy-five from the First Brigade, under Colonel Duffié; five hundred and sixty-five from the Second Brigade, under Colonel McIntosh; seven hundred and sixty from the Reserve Brigade, under Captain Reno, and six guns under Lieutenant Browne.

When the head of the column arrived near the ford, the cracking of carbines told us that the crossing by the advance under Captain Hart had not been accomplished. General Averill was indignant that the surprise had not been effected, although it was afterwards learned that General Lee was cognizant of all our movements, and had reinforced his pickets on the evening of the sixteenth with ninety men, under Captain Moss, to whom he said that the Federal cavalry, four thousand strong, were at Morrisville, and would undertake to carry the ford by daylight the next morning. General Lee further stated that Captain Breckenridge was at the ford with sixty men, and had orders not to fire until the enemy's forces were in the water; that we should not be allowed to cross the ford, and that he would be in supporting distance at sunlight.

Major Chamberlain dashed down to Captain Hart's command, which was dismounted and firing at the enemy, who were in rifle-pits on the other side of the river, from the protection of a mill-race. Captain Hart was ordered to mount his men, form in column of fours and follow the Major across the

river. On reaching the river, Major Chamberlain discovered that the approach to the ford was obstructed by an abattis of felled trees lying across the road. At the same time he discovered that Captain Hart's command was retreating up the river. At this moment his horse was shot in three places, and he received a bullet through his nose. He then returned to the Fourth New York, which had halted a safe distance from the enemy, and sent an officer to General Averill with a request for pioneers. Twenty men from the Sixteenth Pennsylvania, with axes, were sent to Major Chamberlain who ordered them down to the river to cut away the abattis, under the protection of two squadrons of dismounted men acting as sharpshooters, among them being Troop F, of the First Rhode Island. Under cover of this fire, Major Chamberlain again ordered the Fourth New York to follow him, and dashed for the river. The trees had only been partially removed, the fire being so hot from the rifle-pits that the pioneers hid under the banks. It was too hot also for the Fourth New York, and again that redoubtable (?) regiment retreated at break-

neck speed up the river. Major Chamberlain's horse here received another wound, but was not disabled. Giving his valuables to a staff officer, Major Chamberlain rode to the First Rhode Island and asked for volunteers to follow him across the river. All moved forward, when, selecting the platoon on the right, Troop G, commanded by Lieutenant Simeon A. Brown, and ordering Major Farrington with the rest of the regiment to follow in support, they went for the ford with a will. It was difficult work, for but one horse could leap the abattis at a time. Major Chamberlain's horse, frantic from wounds, sprung on a fallen tree, crushed through, and was shot dead as he touched the water. At that moment, Major Chamberlain received his second wound, the ball striking him in the left cheek, ranging down through the neck. The pioneers dragged him up the bank. Lieutenant Brown, followed by his platoon of eighteen men, dashed into the water which was icy cold, four feet deep, and running with a very rapid current. The fire from the rifle-pits was so hot that but three men besides Lieutenant Brown succeeded in reaching

the south bank. These men were Sergeant Emmons D. Guild, and privates John A. Medbury and Patrick Parker. Parker's horse was killed in the river. The rest of the platoon were disabled by being shot themselves or having their horses shot.

The crossing was a gallant act, gallantly done. Lieutenant Brown, who rode a white horse, was a very conspicuous mark. Upon reaching the south bank he rode up to the edge of the rifle-pit and looked down upon the "rebs" for a moment, who were so much astonished at his audacity that they did not fire. Wheeling his horse to the right, managing to get behind a tree in line with the rifle-pits, he waved his sabre in the air for a moment, calling out to the rest of the regiment, "Come on! Come on!!" He then dismounted, turned to Sergeant Guild, and asked him for his carbine. It was handed to him, and firing into the rifle-pit he killed one man and wounded two others. Many shots were fired at Brown, but he escaped being hit, although he had three bullets through his clothing and his horse was hit twice. Sergeant Guild was wounded in the side, but not seriously.

By this time the head of the remainder of the First Rhode Island's column was in the middle of the river, charging across under a heavy fire, the "rebs" in some cases standing up in the pits. I remember particularly one long, lank fellow who had a bead on me, and I thought for a moment my time had come, but I bobbed my head to him and his bullet whistled harmlessly over it. The first to reach the south bank were Major Farrington, Captain Thayer, Lieutenants Fales, Chedell and myself. So far as I was concerned, all the credit there was in it was due to my horse. She had a mind of her own, and that mind was always to be in the front. But although we were the first, the rest of the boys were right behind us. As we reached the bank the "rebs" began to leave their rifle-pits and run towards a piece of woods about a quarter of a mile distant, in which their horses were tied. The south side of the bank was protected by an abattis constructed of stakes driven into the ground, tied together by twigs, and running from the end of one of the pits to the edge of the river. Major Farrington ordered two men to dismount and tear this down,

when Lieutenant Fales jumped his horse over it and rode to the top of the bank, where he waited for Major Farrington, who, with some of the rest of us, were with him in a moment, and a second afterwards dashing after the fleeing "rebs," whom we ordered to throw down their arms and surrender. Twenty-five of them were thus captured and sent to the rear.

During the crossing of the regiment, Colonel Duffié's horse was hit by a bullet and his rider thrown into the river, considerably bruising one of his legs. Lieutenant Rhodes's horse was killed. Near the woods in which the "rebs" had secured their horses there was a fence which was speedily torn down, with which we made fires and warmed and dried ourselves.

The balance of the First Brigade now crossed the river, followed by two guns; then the Second Brigade, and the remainder of the artillery, followed by the reserve. All the horses were watered by squadrons, and we were ready for a forward movement. At eleven o'clock the entire force moved towards Culpeper Court House, fourteen miles dis-

tant, with Colonel McIntosh's command, consisting of the Third, Fourth and Sixteenth Pennsylvania, on the right; Reno's command, consisting of the First and Fifth Regulars, forming the centre and reserve, and Duffié's Brigade, composed of the First Rhode Island, the Fourth New York, and the Sixth Ohio, on the left, the First Rhode Island taking the advance, and the Sixth Ohio being deployed as skirmishers. After advancing something less than a mile, as the head of the column approached the edge of a piece of woods, the enemy was discovered advancing in line with skirmishers. The Fourth New York was ordered to the right to form front into line and advance to the edge of the woods and use carbines; the Fourth Pennsylvania to the left with the same orders, and the section of artillery to the front to open fire. Colonel McIntosh was ordered to form line of battle on the right of the woods, and Captain Reno sent three of his squadrons to the right to act as a reserve, and one squadron up the road to support the centre. One section of artillery was sent to the right to McIntosh.

The enemy's artillery fire was now sweeping the

woods, causing marked disorder among the men of the Fourth New York and Fourth Pennsylvania. The Confederate left was advanced at a trot for the purpose of capturing a house and outbuildings in front of McIntosh, who defeated their purpose by dismounted men of the Sixteenth Pennsylvania, aided by a section of artillery. Our right was then advanced into the field beyond the house, and the enemy's left successfully attacked by McIntosh and Gregg.

In the meantime Duffié had formed the First Rhode Island, the Fourth Pennsylvania and Sixth Ohio in front of the left, with the Fourth New York as a support. At this time the First Rhode Island was in advance on the Culpeper road, alongside of which ran a stone wall, with a small portion of it thrown down. While the First Rhode Island were thus halted in the roadway, a column of Confederate cavalry advanced in squadron front from the woods on the opposite side of the field, and when part way across turned the head of their column to the left and retired, firing with their carbines and pistols as they galloped past. Major Farrington was wounded

by this fire, receiving a pistol shot in the neck, having a most narrow escape from a fatal wound. I was saved from a bad wound in the thigh by the ball striking my sabre's scabbard.

A few minutes afterwards the Confederates advanced through the same piece of woods and charged across in column of battalions, yelling like demons, and apparently confident of victory. Duffié ordered his command, which was in column of fours, forward, and it moved into the field through the gap in the wall, Duffié immediately ordering front into line. Before any troops but the First Rhode Island had time to get into line, Duffié ordered the charge. The First Rhode Island went at the "rebs" with a will, led by Captain Gould, who had taken command upon Major Farrington's retiring to have his wound dressed. The "rebs" retreated in disorder, hardly waiting to feel the sabre, pursued by the First Rhode Island with great spirit, taking many prisoners, among them being Major Breckenridge, a cousin of the Vice-President of the Confederacy, who was captured by Lieutenant Fales. Some of our men went too far, and not

noticing another column of Confederates advancing on their flank were captured. My horse carried me through the Confederate lines, and I escaped by making a detour to the left, jumping a fence into a by-road which ran into the Culpeper road, and turning to the left again jumped a fence back into the field in which the regiment was. In this charge Lieutenant Nathaniel Bowditch, of the First Massachusetts, and Assistant Adjutant General on Colonel Duffié's staff, was mortally wounded after having cut down three rebels. The First Rhode Island lost eighteen men taken prisoners, among them being Captain Thayer and Lieutenant Darling.

Of this charge by the First Rhode Island, the correspondent of the New York *Times* wrote as follows: "Your correspondent has seen in this war several brilliant cavalry charges, but he never saw anything so handsome and exciting as the dashing charge made on the left of our line by Colonel Duffié, commanding on that part of the field."

A few minutes later the Confederates attempted another charge, which was repulsed in such a handsome manner by the First Rhode Island and a squad-

ron of the Fifth Regulars, led by Colonel Duffié, that they retreated a mile before their officers could rally them. About the same time the Confederate cavalry on our right made a demonstration which was effectually checked by McIntosh with the Third and Sixteenth Pennsylvania. In the mean time our artillery was playing on the fleeing rebels and quickening their speed.

It now became necessary to reorganize the command, so the sections of the battery were assembled, stragglers brought up from the rear, and the left of the line, formed by the First Rhode Island and the Sixth Ohio, was rested on the road, the ground on the left being impracticable on account of its marshy condition. The right of the advance was given to the Fifth Regulars. The enemy was driven through the woods about three-quarters of a mile, with the artillery supported by a column in the road, when open ground was made, and the enemy discovered drawn up in line of battle on both sides of the road, and about half a mile in front. The Confederates had been reinforced and were said by prisoners to

be under the command of the redoubtable J. E. B. Stuart himself, aided by Generals Fitzhugh Lee, Rosser and Pelham.

The left of our line was immediately extended under a sharp fire of shot, shell and small arms, under cover of which the Confederate cavalry advanced on both flanks, the force attacking the left and advancing with great steadiness until it had reached within four hundred yards of our battery, which had not yet unlimbered. A section was quickly got into action, however, and with the aid of a charge made by the First Rhode Island and Sixth Ohio the attack was repulsed, the Confederates retreating in much disorder. Their attack on the right had been similarly unsuccessful.

The whole line was now advanced across the open ground through patches of woods until we reached a stubble field. Here we formed in line of battle, the left being composed of the First Rhode Island and Sixth Ohio. On the left of the First Rhode Island was a section of artillery. Immediately in our front, half a mile distant, on rising ground, were three pieces of artillery, two ten-pound Parrots and

one six-pounder. No horses could be discovered about these guns, and from the manner in which they were served it was evident they were protected by earthworks. These guns were served with great effect, for each shot took a man or a horse. This sort of thing was very annoying, and the First Rhode Island and Sixth Ohio were moved to the rear and marched and countermarched for the purpose of keeping out of range of the rebel artillery. During one of the wheels made at this time, Lieutenant Nicolai was killed by my side by a solid shot striking him in the neck. Major Farrington had returned to us some time before this, having had his wound dressed, and was now in command of the regiment.

While we were in this position, manœuvring to keep out of range of the enemy's guns, General Averill rode in front of our line, and pointing to the guns said, "Boys, you mustn't mind the fire from those guns; it won't hurt you; its effect is only a moral one." At this moment a shot struck within a few feet of his horse, the "moral effect" of which was to make the General immediately gallop to the

right of the line to look after affairs there. Shortly after this a demonstration was made by the Confederate left which was repulsed by Colonel McIntosh.

Matters remained very quiet now for some time, with the exception of an occasional shot from the Confederate battery, when, at about half-past four o'clock, occurred one of the most gallant feats of the war, the credit of which belongs to the First Rhode Island and the Sixth Ohio, and of which they have a right to feel very proud.

The rebel guns in front of us had remained quiet for a while when suddenly they began a rapid and annoying fire, under cover of which a column of cavalry was seen advancing in column of fours. Prisoners stated that the command was composed of the First and Fourth Virginia, seven hundred strong, including the famous Black Horse Cavalry, accompanied, if not led, by Stuart himself. The woods from which the Confederates emerged were less than a quarter of a mile distant, and a line of fence ran across the fields from the road on our right.

The rebels advanced at a trot, under fire of our

two guns, which were unable to do much execution on account of defective ammunition, until they came to the fence, where they halted for a moment to allow of its being torn down by dismounted men ; they then advanced, deploying into squadrons. In the meantime the First Rhode Island and Sixth Ohio had again formed on the right of the battery, in *echelon*, for the purpose of supporting it, for its capture was evidently the purpose of the Confederates. When our squadrons had been halted and dressed, for we were manœuvred as if on parade, the order was given to "Advance carbines !" As the Confederates advanced, having now changed from the trot to the gallop, our men were anxious to open fire upon them, but although there were one or two men who indulged in such cries as "Come on, come on, you sons of guns, we can't reach you there," but one man discharged his carbine, whereupon Colonel Duffié, who was sitting quietly on his horse on the right, commanded, "Steady, men ; don't you stir ; we fix 'em ; we give 'em hell !" A moment afterwards the orders were given, "Sling carbines ! Draw sabres !!" Empty scabbards fell back with rattle

and clang, and a line of cold steel flashed in the waning sunlight. On came the "rebs," now changed from the gallop to the charge, yelling and cheering, and firing an occasional shot from carbine or pistol. Captain Rogers, who was in command of the First Rhode Island, said to Major Farrington, "Shall I not go, Major?" "No!" replied the Major. Still we remained quiet. I turned in my saddle and looked at the men behind me. Never shall I forget their appearance. Every sabre was grasped as with a hand of iron; every eye was looking straight to the front; every knee was gripping its owner's saddle as with a vise. They sat indeed like a veritable stone wall; they appeared as immutable as fate. Turning again to the front I could see that the first squadron of the charging "rebs" was wavering; files of men were breaking off from the right and left. I exclaimed to myself, with I am afraid a big, big D, "We've got them." Again Captain Rogers said to the Major, "Shan't I go?" Again Major Farrington replied, "Not yet; wait a minute." Waiting a few seconds longer, till the "rebs" were within a hundred feet of us, the Major

said "Go!" Then came the ringing order from Rogers, "Charge!" At them we went as if shot from a catapult. But they could not stand the cold steel. They broke and ran in wild disorder, leaving a number of dead, wounded and prisoners, among the former being the gallant General Pelham. Sergeant Fitzgerald, of Troop G, First Rhode Island, was killed, shot through the heart. We pursued the fleeing "rebs" but a short distance, when we returned to our battery.

During the day there had been many personal encounters, single horsemen dashing at each other with full speed, and cutting and slashing with their sabres until one or the other was disabled.

There had been many a dashing charge made and repulsed by battalions and regiments, but this last charge by the First Rhode Island and Sixth Ohio, at this time with probably less than two hundred men in line, against the First and Fourth Virginia with four times their number, was by all odds the most brilliant affair of the day, and deserves to be preserved in history. The General commanding pro-

nounced it to be one of the most splendid ever made.

Thus ended the battle of Kelly's Ford. It was now after five o'clock ; the enemy had retired behind their guns ; our men and horses were exhausted ; the artillery's ammunition had been expended ; the object of the expedition had been accomplished, and orders were given for retiring. The reserve was advanced to the front and deployed to mask the battery which was withdrawn, and the regiments retired in succession until the ford was reached and crossed, without the loss of a man in the operation.

The force on our side actively engaged was twenty-one hundred cavalry and six guns. The rebel force was nearly the same, although General Lee acknowledged having but between fourteen hundred and fifteen hundred men and six guns.

The loss of the enemy in killed, wounded and prisoners was more than two hundred. The loss on our side was eighty, of which forty-two were from the First Rhode Island. That tells the story. We had more than half the loss with less than one-tenth of the whole number engaged. Of the Confederate

prisoners more than three-fourths were taken by us.

It was a glorious day for the First Rhode Island Cavalry, and its memory is not to be effaced until we, each and all, are called to respond to life's last taps.

APPENDIX.

In "The Campaigns of Stuart's Cavalry," by Major H. B. McClellan, twelve pages are devoted to this combat at Kelly's Ford, and on page 207 is the following: "General Lee says that only eleven or twelve men were stationed in the rifle-pits at the ford at the time of the attack." This must be a mistake, and the letter of Captain William A. Moss without doubt gives the facts substantially, although he depends upon memory alone. In a previous letter he speaks of having fired five times at the officer on the gray horse (Lieutenant Simeon A. Brown, First Rhode Island Cavalry), who led the column across the ford.

BUCKINGHAM COURT HOUSE, Va., Jan. 22, 1886.

MY DEAR CAPTAIN:

Your letter of the 20th inst. is just received, and I hasten to reply. As I stated to you some time since, I am dependent almost entirely upon memory as to occurrences which took

place during the war, having lost all my papers about the time of the surrender at Appomattox Court House. My memory now is that I carried with me to Kelly's Ford, on the morning of the 17th of March, 1863, about ninety men; that I left as a guard with the horses, in the edge of the woods, about one-half mile back from the ford, on the road to Brandy Station, five men, taking with me eighty-five to the rifle-pits near the ford. Captain Breckenridge was already in position, giving me no opportunity to find out his force, and I do not remember what number he officially reported, but am sure he must have had sixty men with him, making in all one hundred and forty-five men. Captain Breckenridge stated before the Court of Inquiry that he did not fire, being short of ammunition, so all the execution that was done was due to me. I have often wondered how it was that I could have missed the gray horse, as I fired at him more than at his rider, feeling sure that if I brought him down the rider would be helpless, besides the rider had challenged my admiration by his courageous bearing under the trying circumstances. * * * * *

The charge on your part was a gallant one, for few regiments would have undertaken it under the heavy fire that was poured upon them that cold morning.

Very truly your friend,

WM. A. MOSS,

Late Captain Co. K., 4th Va. Cavalry.

To Captain GEORGE N. BLISS,

Providence, R. I.

Major McClellan claims that the Confederate force on this occasion did not exceed eight hundred cavalry, supported by Breathed's battery of four guns, and that the last charge was made by the entire force on the Confederate side. On page 213 he says: "Not a squadron was left to reinforce the charge when broken on the enemy's lines, and there was nothing behind which his regiments could rally, if unsuccessful, except the four guns of Breathed's battery." The charge was unsuccessful, and on page 215 we find: "Now, indeed, there was an opportunity for General Averill to 'rout or destroy' Fitzhugh Lee's brigade. He had a large force in reserve; and two fresh regiments, one on either side of the road, could have swept that field beyond the hope of recovery. He could have ridden over Breathed's guns before the brigade could possibly have formed to protect them." Major McClellan is not complimentary to General Averill. On page 216 he says: "We cannot excuse General Averill's conduct. He ought to have gone to Culpeper Court House." On page 217 we find: "General Lee reports a loss of

eleven killed, eighty-eight wounded, and thirty-four taken prisoners. Of the latter, twenty-five were captured at the ford; only nine were lost in the subsequent fighting. This fact is in itself an eloquent commentary on the conduct of this brigade." General Lee reports a loss of seventy-one horses killed, eighty-seven wounded, and twelve captured. In his address on the battle of Chancellorsville he calls attention to the large proportion of horses killed, as showing "the closeness of the contending forces."

General Averill reports an aggregate loss of eighty. Out of this number, forty-one casualties occurred in the First Rhode Island Cavalry. "This regiment fairly carried off the honors of the day on the Federal side."

